

statement about this program money being cut. I do not think his heart was in it, and I am certain his head was not, but I guess there are certain things one has to do. I hope he will not be doing other things like this that appear on the surface so wrong and something he apparently disagrees with so vehemently.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that during the call of the quorum, which I would suggest, the time be charged equally against both sides.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will visit for a few minutes about medical malpractice, which we will deal with tomorrow. Part of the bill originally had to do with pharmaceuticals. We have had a hard time focusing on pharmaceuticals. The amendment I will discuss expands health care access and has to do with the additional cost brought about by the difficulty arising with lawsuits and medical liability. We need some reform in this area.

In my State of Wyoming, the Wyoming Medical Society has been very concerned. Insurers have been pulling out of the markets or increasing premiums that are above affordable levels. It is a substantial problem. The crisis is now in Casper, WY. Of course, it is all over the country as well. We are beginning to lose some of the practitioners. That is difficult, particularly in an underserved area.

I rise today to support the McConnell amendment on medical malpractice tort reform. The Senate passed this exact language in 1995. There is little reason we should not pass it again. Physicians alone spent \$6.3 billion in malpractice insurance premiums last year. This does not include what other providers such as hospitals have paid. This amendment is a good step in the right direction to reduce or limit the cost of health care to all persons.

The McConnell amendment does a number of things, all of which are very important and necessary. It limits punitive damages to two times the sum of compensatory damages. The amendment only allows punitive damages in cases where the award has been by clear and convincing evidence. It also places limits on attorney's fees, limiting lawyers to collecting a third of the first \$150,000 of an award and 25 per-

cent of the award for amounts above \$150,000. It requires lawsuits be filed within 2 years of the claimant's discovery of the injury. It encourages States to develop alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to help resolve issues before the court.

It seems to me it is a step in the right direction in doing something about these costs. Some of the premiums that physicians are required to pay to practice are amazing. The result is many retreat from practice are particularly those in Medicare where relatively low fees are being paid.

Median malpractice awards increased by 43 percent in 2002 to \$1 million; 52 percent of all jury awards are now over \$1 million. These excessive awards only contribute to the overall costs of health care for all Americans. Since awards drive up malpractice premiums and physicians must pass that on to their consumers, health insurance premiums for everyone continue to go up.

Many Americans are not now able to afford health insurance. They are currently 40 million uninsured Americans.

Recent reports show that medical malpractice is responsible for 7 percent or \$5 billion of the overall increases in health care costs. Last year, one of the largest physician insurers in the Nation stopped its medical malpractice business. As a direct result, some doctors and hospitals see their premiums rising 20 to 100 percent. Some specialists are paying over \$100,000 a year in premiums. Obstetrics is a particular problem. Hospitals in two rural counties in West Virginia have stopped delivering babies; half of 93 obstetricians in Clark County no longer accept new patients. One Nevada obstetrician closed her 10-year practice after her malpractice premiums went from \$37,000 to \$150,000. All of this, of course, must come from the patients.

It is clear something needs to be done to address this growing crisis. According to the American Medical Association, 12 States are in crisis now; 30 are showing signs of being in crisis; 8 are currently OK.

I hope as we talk about this tomorrow, we can do some things that start us moving in the right direction. The cost of health care is certainly an important issue to all of us. We have to deal with it in pharmaceutical costs. We have sought to deal with it by getting physicians into underserved areas by various means. But one of the ways that is important and has changed is the matter of the cost of medical malpractice tort reform. I hope we can deal with it tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING President pro tempore. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

#### THE MINERS AND SOMERSET COUNTY

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to speak about the gallant men, nine miners from Somerset County in my State of Pennsyl-

vania, who went through a most extraordinary ordeal—77 hours trapped in a mine. The eyes and ears of the world were on Somerset County, people wondering if it was possible for men in an underground mine shaft, immersed in water reportedly 4 feet to 5 feet high, no food, no communication with the outside world—people wondered whether those men could survive. Almost in a miraculous way, finally, through the extraordinary efforts of Federal, State, and local rescuers, those nine men were rescued at 2:44 a.m. on Sunday, just yesterday. Their ordeal started on Wednesday, July 24, at 9 p.m., and ended on Sunday morning, July 28 at 2:44 a.m.

People are in amazement around the world, at their successful rescues. It is very unusual, very odd to say the least, that a small county in western Pennsylvania, more than 50 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, would be the focus of so much international attention.

Last September 11, as we all know, a flight crashed into Somerset, one of the four hijacked by terrorists on September 11, the flight widely believed to be headed to this building, the Capitol of the United States. No one can be sure—some have speculated it might have been headed to the White House—but the speculation was that the plane which crashed into the Pentagon was headed to the White House.

In any event, Somerset County was the site of an international tragedy less than a year ago. It is more than lightning, but to have lightning, so to speak, strike twice in such a small county in western Pennsylvania is unusual. But this time, instead of tragedy, instead of the loss of lives, these men were rescued.

In an era where there is so much bad news around the world, so much difficulty with terrorism around the world, the problems with the Palestinian terrorists against Israel, the grave difficulties between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the differences and fighting between the North Koreans and South Koreans and all the problems of Africa—and that litany could be the subject of a lengthy conversation—to find a bright spot, find a success, find a rescue, is certainly more than a breath of fresh air for the entire world but especially, of course, for the miners who were involved: Mr. Randy Fogle, Mr. Harry Blaine Mayhugh, Mr. Thomas Foy, Mr. John Unger, Mr. John Phillippi, Mr. Ronald Hileman, Mr. Dennis Hall, Jr., Mr. Robert Pugh, and Mr. Mark Popenack.

Representing Pennsylvania, as I have for some 22 years now, I have obviously been intimately connected with the issue of the coal miners, with some 30 billion tons of bituminous in western Pennsylvania and 7 billion tons of anthracite in northeastern Pennsylvania and the mining industries being struggling industries, this industry has taken up a great deal of time—not only of mine, but of the entire Pennsylvania delegation, really beyond the Pennsylvania delegation.